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Suburban club versus coffee house club: Jewish difference and the topography of Viennese football

SOURCE DESCRIPTION

On October 8, 1927, a commentary appeared in the popular Viennese sports magazine Illustriertes Sportblatt that dealt with the sporting developments in Viennese football. The article is exemplary for the construction of a specific cultural topography of the city, which in interwar Vienna was defined not least by the category of "Jewish difference [jüdischer Differenz]". Before and after 1918, Vienna was an important place for the development of various Jewish self-perceptions and external images of "Jews". The Jewish population of the city was just under ten percent. An important field of activity for Jewish men - and to a limited extent Jewish women - was football, which established itself as one of the most important mass cultures during this period and established Vienna as one of its European centers. Football stadiums became spaces for political discourse, combining sport and society. A cultural topography of Viennese football emerged in and around the stadiums that has remained powerful to this day. It revolved around the central antagonism between the suburbs with their proletarian connotations and the bourgeois city, of "down-to-earth [bodenständigen]" clubs such as the Rapid sports club or the Floridsdorfer Admira, which were juxtaposed with the "city clubs" Wiener Amateur-Sportverein (called Amateure, later FK Austria) and the national Jewish SC Hakoah. The cipher "Jewish" was associated with the city center and the coffee house - as a metaphor and place for club meetings.

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The Illustrierte Sportblatt (1905–1928) was one of the best-known media in the Viennese sports press. The paper's line was the position of "apolitical" bourgeois sport, which set itself apart from the ideological movement culture of workers' sport in *Red Vienna* and placed professional football at the centre of its reporting, despite occasional criticism of the commodification of sport - of which the media world itself was a part.

The article begins by describing Rapid as the prototypical suburban club: rooted, close to the people and close to home. "Rapid is rooted in the local community and never neglects its home turf. The Grün-weißen are a suburban club in the best sense of the word. [Rapid wurzelt in der Bevölkerung und vernachlässigt den heimischen Boden nie. Die Grün-weißen sind ein Vorstadtklub im besten Sinne des Wortes.]" Rapid stands for natural growth, home and "down-to-earthness [Bodenständigkeit]". The other suburban clubs included football clubs such as Admira, based in the Floridsdorf district of Jedlesee, champions of the

1926/27 season, who are celebrated in the article after their 6:0 victory against FK Austria, champions of the previous season:

“Admira’s goals thundered through Austria’s defense like bludgeons on Sunday. Up-and-coming, healthy youngsters bombarded the defense of a formation that had become rotten. Sport triumphed over business. The fresh Jedlesee meadow air blew away the stuffy coffee house haze. The team of players has beaten the team of wage football. [Wie Keulenschläge dröhnten am Sonntag die Goals der Admira im Gehäuse der Austria. Aufstrebende, gesunde Jugend bombardierte die Verteidigungsstellung einer morsch gewordenen Formation. Der Sport hat über das Geschäft triumphiert. Die frische Jedleseer Wiesenluft hat den stickigen Kaffeehausdunst weggeweht. Die Mannschaft der Spieler hat das Team des Gagenfußballs glatt niedergebügelt.]”

FK Austria (FAK) was considered a “Jewish club”. The FAK was a so-called social club, a cultural organization located in the Viennese bohemian scene, the city’s vibrant coffee house culture, and associated with theatres and writers. From the very beginning, the FAK saw itself as a bourgeois football club that offered a place for Jews and non-Jews alike. At the FAK, identity boundaries were instead drawn on the basis of class and gender. Political attitudes or affiliation to Judaism took a back seat. FAK nevertheless had Jewish connotations and was a place for Jews, but never an explicitly Jewish association. Until 1938, it had a higher number of Jewish officials than other Viennese clubs.

To this day, FAK is considered the prototypical Viennese city- and coffee house club. In fact, the club’s management operated from the Dom Café, where the amateurs were founded in 1911. In the 1920s, fans bought tickets for FAK football matches in the coffee houses. The coffee houses in the city were often used for discussions with supporters and meetings with sponsors. Emanuel Schwarz, the Jewish president of the FAK, lived just a few minutes away from the Dom Café.

In general, football in Vienna also became socially relevant in the city’s coffee houses, where there were now dozens of football club coffee houses. Every club fan knew which one to go to in order to meet their favorite player. Almost every sports club had its own coffee house or favorite pub, often located close to the respective sports ground. The coffee houses also had a specific connotation: they were imagined as Jewish places. While other clubs and non-Jews also used coffee houses, the FAK in particular was associated with coffee houses and became known as a “Jewish club”.

The “professional football [Gagenfußball]” of the FK Austria criticized in the article - with its connotations of drama and speculation - refers to the economic conditions of the Viennese football boom: professionalism had been introduced in the league in 1924/25. The first professional champions were Sportclub Hakoah. Founded in 1909, the club was the largest Zionist sports club in Vienna, whose founders - in contrast to FK Austria - were firmly committed to the concept of muscular Judaism, the physical training of Jewish youth and the fight against the anti-Semitic image of the weak Jew. After the First World War, Hakoah had succeeded in rising to the top level of football; the team, which was made up of Viennese players and international stars such as Béla Guttmann, won the league title. Through its tours, Hakoah became an ambassador for Zionism in Eastern Europe and the USA, although the sporting and financial basis of professional football remained in crisis in the following years, partly due to the departure of prominent players. From 1922, Hakoah had its own sports ground in Krieau, an area located on the edge of Vienna’s

Prater district in Leopoldstadt, a center of Jewish life in the city. While the Illustrierte Sportblatt even praised the “higher idea [höhere Idee]” of muscular Judaism, the article also painted a picture of “decay [Verfall]” and used the anti-Semitic cipher of “business spirit [Geschäftsgeist]”, which had a “corrosive [zersetzend]” effect on the club and would cause its own young players to be neglected.

The text associates FAK and Hakoah with the business world and the coffee house. Rapid and Admira, on the other hand, are portrayed as young, lively, offensive and healthy. In short: coffee house versus nature, sport versus commerce. “Jewish club” versus suburban club. Social orientations and values were linked to ideals such as tradition and modernity, which in turn were associated with certain football clubs and their locations - the “city” with the coffee house or the suburbs with the meadow. Until the “Anschluss” to Nazi Germany in 1938, the top football league in Austria was composed exclusively of Viennese teams, meaning that the local identities between the Viennese teams were of particular relevance. From an (inter)national perspective, all Viennese teams represented the city of Wien. At a local level, people emphasized supposed or actual differences between them - in the context of FAK and Hakoah, Rapid and Admira by means of the difference between city and suburb, a juxtaposition that went far beyond football and in which the concept of “Jewish difference” was of central importance.

Although the binary between city and suburb did not always explicitly refer to “Jews”, it was nevertheless often based on Jewish difference. The article *Die Vorstadt führt* illustrates this contrast: “The healthy, unspoilt suburb [Die gesunde, unverbrauchte Vorstadt]” leads “physically, morally and materially [physisch, moralisch und materiell]”. The article praises Rapid, “the representative of local football [die Vertretung des heimischen Fußballs]”, for its “player material [Spielermaterial]”, which was almost exclusively “home-grown [Eigenbau]” and lacked any “adventurous business policy [abenteuerliche Geschäftspolitik]”. The locally anchored suburban club represents the concrete “down-to-earthness [Bodenständigkeit]”, while the city club stands for the abstract world of money - a binary that resembles the anti-Semitic difference between the creative (good, non-Jewish) and acquisitive (“Jewish”) capital.

Down-to-earth Heimat versus rootless metropolis

The Viennese Jews were for Vienna what Vienna symbolized for the rest of Austria: an important symbol for the ‘other’, important for the definition of the self. Vienna appeared to the provinces as a dangerous ‘Jewish’ metropolis, while in Vienna the suburbs were imagined as a rough and proletarian place, but also as a village-like remnant of *Old Vienna*, as a place of purity, honesty, decency and morality. The fact that clubs such as Admira and Rapid represented the suburbs and the FAK, in absolute contrast, the city, was part of an urban-suburban divide with anti-Semitic undertones. Suburban clubs perceived themselves as authentic because they constructed their identity in opposition to the “Jewish club” FAK and the Jewish club Hakoah.

Anti-Semitism is contradictory and ambivalent. Anti-Semites have accused “Jews” of capitalism and communism, urbanism and globalism. FK Austria was imagined to represent both rootlessness and the city. It represented the modern metropolis, but was also seen as homeless, partly because the club did not have its own sports ground between the 1920s and 1970s and played on various sports grounds. All other clubs were associated with a specific neighborhood, whereas the FAK seemed to have no roots in the city. Clubs such as Rapid and Florisdorfer SC Admira created their collective identity in opposition to the FAK

and created an “authentic” and locally rooted aura around their clubs. Above all, however, these clubs were considered “down-to-earth” because they compared themselves to the FAK and the Hakoah. Being down-to-earth is a value or concept that emphasises being rooted in one's homeland. “Heimat” expresses a deep sense of belonging, identity and cultural heritage that is tied to a specific place. “Down-to-earthness [Bodenständigkeit]” is linked to nationalism, nature and the concept of the people and emphasizes regional pride and supposed cultural unity. The contrast between down-to-earth and cosmopolitan distinguishes between the suburbs and the big city, between the local and the global. In anti-Semitism, the image of the “ever-wandering Jew [immer wandernden Juden]” serves as a counter-image to down-to-earthness. In Austria in the interwar period, “Bodenständigkeit” became a key political, social and cultural concept of inclusion and marginalization, which was increasingly used to imagine oneself as connected to one’s homeland and non-Jewish.

The connotation that the FAK was a “Jewish club” is therefore charged with anti-Semitic imagery and cannot simply be explained by the FAK’s connection to Vienna’s bourgeois (Jewish) culture.

Many other Viennese clubs had Jewish presidents, but nobody called them “Jewish clubs”. Why? Because they presented themselves as district and suburban clubs and were therefore perceived as completely “down-to-earth [bodenständig]”. Rapid’s president Hans Fischer, who was celebrated in the article in Illustrierten Sportblatt, and the then president of the equally “down-to-earth [bodenständig]” Floridsdorfer Admira, Rudolf Mütz, were also former members of Vienna’s Jewish community and had converted to the Protestant and Catholic denominations respectively. The “Judenklub”-identity is not based on an empirical core, but on identities that are ascribed to certain clubs.

Conclusion

With the emergence of organized fan cultures such as hooliganism in the 1970s, the “Jewish club” image of the FAK also took on new meaning. The club and its fans were subjected to anti-Semitic insult. At the same time, right-wing extremist fans also established themselves in the stands of the FAK, which paid little attention to its past as a “Jewish club”. For some years now, FAK has reinterpreted the image of the “Jewish club” in a positive light - for example at commemorative events around November 9 at the Holocaust memorial on Judenplatz in Vienna’s city center. In this context, the FAK board and team emphasize a Jewish cultural heritage that is intended to create a positive identity against neo-Nazis in their own fan scene and anti-Semitism in society.

Since the rediscovery of fin-de-siècle Vienna in the 1980s, the coffee house has been one of the central images of - tourist - cultural heritage. However, since the 1990s, the history of Hakoah and its sporting successes has also become a positive part of the city’s history in a changed Austrian culture of remembrance, which manifests itself not least in specific locations such as the sports ground in Vienna’s Krieau district, which was restituted to the club in 2004 after decades of struggle.

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